The role of student staff in customer service in an academic library

* Teach students to view questions as opportunities to start conversations, (such as) “ Did you find everything you were looking for?”

“Would you like me to go with you to help you find this?”

* People see what appears to be a help desk, and expect to get help (what a thought!)

Circulation is the one service desk that nearly every library patron has to use at some point – they deserve to be greeted in a friendly, respectful manner and helped whenever possible – refer them to the appropriate service area if you don’t know the answer.

* Make eye contact with the person you are helping. If there are other people waiting in line, make eye contact with them and tell them you’ll be right with them – if you are the only person at the desk, ring the bell to call for more help
* Greet patrons warmly – for many, a visit to the library is the first place they go on campus – looking for a familiar (safe) place to get directions (parent/student tours, students new to town) We have a large building – 3 stories, which can be confusing – ½ of our main collection is on the 2nd floor, ½ on the 3rd floor, government documents on 1st & 3rd floors – reserve items and media behind the circulation desk, Reference on 1st floor
* Get up from the desk to greet people – they are not “interrupting us” - they are the reason we are here
* Have students wear nametags when shelving materials and doing floor sweeps (pushing in chairs, picking up newspapers and materials – hourly). For their protection, have nametags with 1st name (only) or “Student Staff”

Ask patrons on upper floors if they are finding the materials they need

* Since we do not have a large professional library staff, student workers can play a very positive role in our patrons’ attitude about library staff (we usually have 20 of them working throughout the library). They represent the library to many of our patrons, as they are an important part of our front-line staff. We must do more than pay “lip service” to customer service training (for them) and recognize and reward good service (catch them doing something right)
* Utilize students who have the best customer service skills to mentor new students
* Look at annual training updates as **opportunities** to emphasize excellent customer service practices (customer service is not just a “nice idea we’ll get around to when we have time”– it is vital if we want to keep students and other patrons coming into our libraries when so much is now available online). We know the best resources we have, but our patrons need to feel comfortable in asking (either in person or online) for help
* Use new technology to promote training (U-Tube, BLOGS – & update often)
* Comparisons in hiring (i.e. book stores) hire the most pleasing, out-going personalities – it is essential that staff working with the public (in circulation) enjoy contact with strangers & become energized by helping people. Work at a public service desk can be extremely tiring for people who are introverts – customers know when staff members really enjoy interacting with them or if they are being “politely (or impolitely) tolerated”
* No matter what services the library offers or how extensive the collection, customers will leave with a neutral or negative impression if they don’t feel the spark of human kinship. Positive personal interaction with another human being will usually outweigh other negative emotions (Creating)
* If staff members really don’t enjoy working with customers, they will find excuses to avoid them, and this may be the reason for many “invisible” staff members. (Creating) Remember, in a bookstore, you can almost always find help. Put your best people up front to be that help in the library.

Introverted staff members are not able to create jobs that minimize contact with the public, but supervisors can recognize this need and move them to less public areas (i.e. tech. services). Both the employee and the supervisor should realize “up-front” is not the place for some people, but they may be a “whiz” at book repair, searching duplicates lists, processing new materials, organizing government documents. They don’t have to be “let go”, just put in an area that more closely matches what they are comfortable in doing

* Write a job description for students so they know what expectations are for them
* Re-think the whole issue of training – invest in customer service training materials (at least with time and imagination)

Reach out to patrons (who are our customers) to learn ways to ask for their feedback and find out what is important to them – **listen to their feedback** (example – at Mesa State, we are making testing sheets/booklets/flash drives available for sale – because of our patrons’ requests)

* Develop a program to implement customer service in small steps (star program – peer recognition – catch each other doing things “right”) and build on the program each year
* Find creative ways to include experienced students in the library’s new staff training
* Students (and all employees) want structure, goals, and feedback
* Never underestimate the ability and talents of students (or young workers) – they will be a positive addition to your library if given the chance

These tips work for student staff OR any younger staff members OR people new to working in libraries

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